

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **CIVILIAN DOWNSIZING**

Since the beginning of the drawdown in 1989, we have learned a number of lessons about successful downsizing programs. There are five keys to successful downsizing -- planning, attention to detail, attention to people, communication, and evaluation.

- A successful plan requires goals and milestones, identification of stakeholders, integration of all appropriate downsizing tools, analysis of costs, identification of resources, and establishment of a timeline.
- Attention to detail before any reduction actions are taken is critical. Human resources staff, supervisors, managers, and employees should review all of the records upon which the reductions will be based. In the course of downsizing, each piece of information given to employees or the public should be screened for accuracy before release.
- Taking care of people is the most important part of downsizing. Because of the turmoil associated with change, any workforce problems will be exacerbated. Downsizing organizations should expect an increased number of grievances and appeals. Injury compensation cases and sick leave usage will increase. Workplace violence is possible. Productivity will likely decrease. To counter these problems, we recommend:
  - Special training for the staff that will carry out the downsizing;
  - Transition assistance for all employees to include counseling, resume preparation, interview skills, and job search skills; and
  - Use of all available resources including organization staff, unions, private contractors, and community organizations (the Red Cross and hospitals, as well as banks and financial institutions, often will provide free counseling).
- In downsizing, nothing is as important as communication, and you cannot over communicate.
  - Top leadership must provide clear messages and directions that supervisors and managers must echo.
  - Communication must be constant.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

### **CIVILIAN DOWNSIZING** **(CONT'D)**

- It must take a variety of forms: from group meetings (both large and small) to one-on-one sessions; from formal written documents to e-mail to bulletin board notices; and from regularly scheduled information flow to that designed to stop the “rumor of the day.”
- Communication should share information, highlight successes (such as outplacement numbers), and celebrate endings.
- Finally, organizations undergoing downsizing must continually evaluate their efforts by going back to their downsizing plan to mark achievements, measure failures, and make course corrections. Statistical reviews as well as on-sight focus groups and evaluations are beneficial.

Following these keys will ease some of the trauma for exiting staff. However, organizations must also be mindful of “survivor sickness” and pay careful attention to the employees who will make up the core workforce after downsizing.